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WILDLIFE SERVICES—PENNSYLVANIA

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USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania is a diverse ecological mix of urban, suburban, agricultural, and forested environments that are home to valuable wildlife populations as well as more than 12 million people. Every day, residents, industries, organizations, and agencies call on Pennsylvania Wildlife Services (WS) for expertise in protecting agriculture, property, natural resources, and human health and safety from damage or threats posed by wildlife. Managed by professional wildlife biologists, WS responds with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

WS protects Pennsylvania's citizens from human health and safety problems associated with wildlife at airports; gulls and barn swallows at industrial facilities; and resident Canada geese around homes, schools, and workplaces. WS also assists the Pennsylvania agricultural community in reducing crop losses from geese and damage at livestock facilities associated with European starlings. Through partnerships with other natural resource management agencies, WS biologists and technicians protect threatened and endangered species and habitat by reducing negative impacts caused by more abundant wildlife species.

Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this

Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting passengers, aircraft, and communities from wildlife collisions with aircraft
- Protecting human health and safety and property from damage caused by Canada geese, vultures, gulls, and barn swallows
- Protecting aquaculture facilities from bird depredation
- Protecting livestock facilities from European starlings
- Protecting habitat, property, and human health and safety from over abundant deer populations

Top WS Research Projects of Interest to Pennsylvania:

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Evaluating waterfowl as disease, parasite, and noxious weed reservoirs
- Developing chemistry-based tools for wildlife damage management
- Inducing infertility as a wildlife management tool.



technical assistance can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or *direct assistance*, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts *scientific research* across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology. The WS program in Pennsylvania, in conjunction with WS' National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC), has been involved with bird predation and damage prevention studies at aquaculture facilities and is presently testing lasers to aid in bird dispersal.

Protecting Air Travel—Since 1995, collisions between aircraft and wildlife have killed more than 115 people, and the threat to public safety from these wildlife strikes is increasing. Experts estimate that wildlife strikes cost civil aviation more than \$470 million annually. Pennsylvania's airports serve millions of passengers each year, and are situated in the Atlantic Flyway, the north-south migration corridor for birds such as gulls and Canada geese. Airports, the traveling public, and agencies are keenly interested in managing wildlife strikes to protect public safety. NWRC conducts research to understand the nature of wildlife hazards at airports, develop effective management tools to reduce these hazards, and monitor the effectiveness of hazard control programs. In Pennsylvania, WS biologists and technicians provide expert wildlife management recommendations to airports to reduce or eliminate wildlife hazards. They also assist airports with wildlife permitting processes, provide wildlife hazard management training to airport personnel, and conduct direct assistance to reduce hazards.

A WS biologist stationed at the Philadelphia International Airport works closely with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the City of Philadelphia to monitor and reduce hazards from wildlife through

habitat management, behavior modification, and other methods. Currently, WS biologists are working cooperatively with twelve additional airports to assess wildlife hazards, develop site-specific wildlife hazard management programs, and provide operational support with the implementation of wildlife damage management plans.

Protecting Property and Human Health and Safety—In Pennsylvania, resident Canada geese are found in backyards, farm fields, playgrounds, municipal and county recreation areas, and on private landscaping. Although most people enjoy seeing a few geese around, problems quickly develop when goose feces accumulates and overgrazing damages landscaping and shorelines. Each year, WS biologists assist more than 300 Pennsylvania residents with goose-related problems by providing technical advice, group presentations, assistance with permit processes, and direct removal of geese and their nests. Recently, WS worked with more than 40 Pennsylvania cooperators including, corporations, airports, hospitals, military installations, and municipalities to reduce the safety threats and property damage associated with these geese. The problems caused by these expanding goose populations have led researchers and others to consider Canada goose population management as a means to minimize the conflicts between humans and geese. WS strives to create community programs and innovative solutions to resolve problems in a way that balances the needs of people and geese.

Urban deer populations also continue to grow in many parts of Pennsylvania. The increased number of deer, combined with urban traffic, typically result in hazardous situations for both deer and drivers. Deer are hosts for ticks that carry Lyme disease, which can spread to humans. In addition to increased disease threats, vehicle collisions, and other property damage, deer also destroy habitat in city parks and natural areas. WS works to protect park habitats from the negative impacts of large numbers of deer. Reduction efforts have significantly reduced deer/vehicle collisions surrounding various park areas. The diversity of park species is expected to improve with continued damage management.

Lyme disease is not the only wildlife-borne disease of concern in Pennsylvania. Rabies poses a serious threat to livestock, wildlife, pets, and public health. Raccoon rabies was first detected in Pennsylvania in 1982 and has since spread throughout the State and into adjacent States. Presently, more than 99 percent of all confirmed rabies cases in Pennsylvania are of the raccoon rabies variant. Although human deaths from rabies are rare, the estimated public health costs associated with disease detection, prevention, and control have risen nationally, exceeding \$300 million annually.

In 2002, Pennsylvania WS cooperated with other Federal, State, and local agencies to create a vaccination immune barrier along Lake Erie and Ohio. This barrier connects with the Ohio oral rabies vaccination barrier, which was established first. Oral rabies vaccine baits distributed throughout the targeted area vaccinate raccoons against rabies,



thus preventing its spread. The continued distribution of the oral rabies vaccine will not only reduce the incidence of rabies, but will ultimately eliminate raccoon rabies in Pennsylvania, as well as in the entire eastern United States.

Looking to the Future

WS provides the people of Pennsylvania with safe, effective, and humane assistance for a diverse and growing range of wildlife conflicts, but challenges remain. Evaluating wildlife damage problems and implementing solutions require expertise and resources that may be beyond the financial reach of some citizens. With current resources, the program can only provide direct assistance to those individuals or private entities that can pay for the service.

Pennsylvania’s large population of resident Canada geese will pose increasing challenges over time. In many areas, harassment and habitat modification are not enough to reduce community-wide goose problems. Professional goose population management programs may become necessary, and will pose challenges to the limited staff and resources in Pennsylvania. Similarly, increasing populations of deer, vultures, gulls, and other species are posing increasing hazards to Pennsylvania airports. Emerging public health situations such as those associated with West Nile virus will also continue to challenge WS staff and resources in Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania Wildlife Services Funding •••••

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.

